

Anna Craft....and beyond

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Anna was a possibility thinker of the very best kind. As a team of researchers working on the Possibility Thinking (PT) concept together over the last ten years, we spent many hours pouring over second-by-second film analysis of children in different settings, debating whether PT and its features were there or not. Sometimes our evidence would suggest it was not. At these times, Anna was a reliably good place to check for a reminder of what we were looking for. She was always thinking 'what if?' always asking how we might move from 'what is' to 'what might be?' She was always able to creatively find a way round problems to do what needed to be done, and more. Her sometimes apparently risky solutions could be met with raised eyebrows by colleagues with a more linear bent, but often provided just the innovation that was needed. Anna was also especially self-determined and actioned her ideas as well as conceptualising them. Although serious and rigorous in her work and thinking Anna was also playful. If left to our own devices, as a team we could be relied upon to produce post-it notes, balls of string and Lego from our bags if the debate or workshop needed to imaginatively stretch the thinking beyond the obvious and immerse colleagues and students in fully moving from 'what is' to 'what might be'.

Anna first coined the term PT around 15 years ago, and alongside living it, she researched and wrote about it prolifically. The concept first began to see the light of day at the turn of the century in chapters, in edited books focused on 'little c' or everyday creativity (e.g. Craft, 2001), where she put forward a democratic notion of what it meant to be creative within education. She then began to solo author her own books firstly on creativity in Primary Education (Craft, 2000) then in Early Years Education (Craft, 2002), where PT increasingly became the lynchpin of her thinking. Integrated with this conceptual work was her empirical work with academic colleagues as well as practitioners as researchers which fuelled a plethora of well-cited PT-focused peer-reviewed articles and chapters. Early empirical work with Teresa Cremin and Pamela Burnard focused on elucidating the features of PT, its accompanying pedagogies and how these were evidenced in mainly Early Years classrooms (Burnard et al., 2006; Cremin et al., 2006). The team then expanded to include Kerry Chappell and further empirical work deepened understanding of question-posing as the driver within PT (Chappell et al., 2008).

Over the last five years PT studies have gone on to include the role of narrative in relation to question-posing and imagination at the heart of creativity; as well as new colleagues such as Tatjana Dragovic, Linda McConnon and Alice Matthews contributing to papers drawing on studies of PT with children from 2 to 11 (Craft et al, 2012; Craft, McConnon and Matthews, 2012; Cremin, Chappell, and Craft, 2013). All the empirical work that Anna led on and co-researched was carried out in naturalistic settings in early years and primary classrooms in England, using observation, interview and, at times, video-stimulated review, enabling teachers and children to reflect on learning and creativity. The most recent of these studies will be published in late 2014, posthumously in *Education 3-13* (Craft and Chappell, 2014). Taking the original core features of PT together with the new narrative features, this last PT study in which Anna was actively involved explores the role of PT in social change in classrooms and schools. Anna had also recently begun to examine PT in relation to the concept of wise humanising creativity, a concept co-developed with Kerry Chappell within the Dance Partners for Creativity research project (Chappell with Craft, Rolfe and Jobbins, 2012) and applied in the C2Learn project (Walsh, Chappell & Craft, in preparation) and in relation to educational futures in various articles

across 2013 (e.g. Craft, 2013) and in a Handbook chapter to be published posthumously (Craft, 2014).

These recent papers are testament to the fact that PT is a living idea that many will continue to work with. Anna was once sitting in a circle in a seminar a few years ago; everyone had been asked by the facilitator to give a metaphor for how they worked. When it was her turn, Anna said that she saw herself as a bee, flying around and pollinating other people with her ideas, her thinking, her 'what if' questions. The network of colleagues and students who work with her ideas demonstrates how successfully she did this, no more so than via her PhD students. Completed dissertations include PT in mathematics in upper primary education in England (Clack, Exeter), PT in drama in upper primary education in Taiwan (Lin, Exeter), PT and innovation education (Jonsdottir, Iceland), PT in secondary art in Taiwan (Ting, Exeter), PT in social exclusion (Greenwood, Exeter), PT in early years visual art in England (McConnon, Exeter). Three PhD studies are also in their final stages: PT in museum education in Cyprus (Gregoriou, Exeter) and PT in piano tuition in Taiwan (Yeh, Exeter).

Institutionally, Anna's thinking was grounded in her early study of Social and Political Sciences at University of Cambridge, and her M level study of Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education in London. Her ideas then mainly developed within her work in the Faculty of Education, at the Open University where she worked for 23 years, and the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education, which she joined, as Professor, in January 2007. She arrived at the Open University in 1991 as a lecturer, she was later promoted to senior lecturer, then Reader, then she became a Professor in 2007. This all built on her earlier work as a practicing primary teacher, and was informed by her time as a visiting scholar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In both universities she was a highly valued colleague and friend. At the Open University she contributed to a number of courses on early and primary years education and established with Bob Jeffrey, the Creativity in Education Community, and an Inter-Faculty Research Group as well as the Open Creativity Centre. With Bob too, she co-founded the BERA creativity SIG in 2001, and ran an ESRC seminar series on Creativity. With Teresa Cremin and Pam Burnard (the SIG's later co-convenors with Anna), she also ran an International Symposium on Documenting Creative Learning. At the University of Exeter she contributed new, now ongoing modules on creativity, the arts and educational futures and established the Centre for Creativity Research in Education AT Exeter (CREATE). The latter especially has become very influential both nationally and internationally in promoting the importance of placing creativity at the heart of the learning process. Her most recent research projects included: Possibility Thinking and child-initiated play, Creative Primary Practice, Possibility Thinking and creative change in schools, and two EU projects Creative Little Scientists (exploring the synergies between creativity and science and mathematics in the early years) and Create2Learn (developing collaborative creativity in online playful contexts).

Revolving around Anna's work on PT were her developing critiques and provocations of creativity in education in general. These grew through her consideration of the cultural and social issues surrounding creativity in education in *Creativity in Education: Tensions and Dilemmas* (Craft, 2005) to considering creativity in relation to educational futures and the questions that are raised by the 21st Century shift towards technology in *Creativity and Education Futures: Learning in a digital age* (Craft, 2011). Over the last twenty years Anna has therefore become internationally known and highly respected for her work on creativity, creative learning and creative pedagogies. Her 5 single authored books, 10 edited texts, 53 chapters and 46 peer

reviewed journal articles provide a body of work which variously examines the concept of creativity in education, the tensions and dilemmas involved, the concepts of 'Possibility Thinking', wise humanising creativity and the relationship between creativity and educational futures.

Not surprisingly Anna was in high demand as a keynote speaker and consultant and until the last year of her life was contributing to the international creativity in education arena regularly in this way in Europe, the Middle East, Australasia, the Far East, America and elsewhere. Her insightful understanding of creativity in education also led her to co-found with Professor Rupert Wegerif, a high impact international Journal of Thinking Skills and Creativity. According to Rupert, Anna's energy, enthusiasm and global network of contacts were essential to moving this journal from an idea to a reality. She loved the journal and worked constantly to give supportive feedback to new researchers publishing research on creativity from around the globe. She also worked as a Government Advisor on creativity in education in the UK.

Across all of this, Anna was an incredibly wise and kind colleague who provided unstinting support to her students and to the many colleagues who she worked with. In particular, many doctoral students and early career researchers benefitted from her wisdom and the advice that she gave so generously. Anna was passionate about agency and finding ways to empower others to make positive creative educational change happen. This also involved school students and teachers through collaborative projects like Aspire; current work with The Cambridge Primary Review Trust, where she was a Director, and in very recently developing the Children's Voices teachers professional development course for Pearson plc with members of the original Aspire team.

In her 52 years, she touched the lives of many people in education, of all ages, and she will be sorely missed by all of us, including her friends and colleagues in many other parts of the world and, of course, her family. One heartening element of this remarkable academic and thought leader does, however, remain with us: her ideas and thinking are captured in her prolific writing which offer rich new insights on third, fourth and fifth readings which means educators, researchers and teachers can benefit from her wisdom and be provoked by her challenges for years to come.

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